11: Moser L-5 (1956-1961) 1963
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THE KIVA

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A Journal of the Arizona
Archaeological and Historical Society

Volume 28

Number 3

February 1963

[Title Page]

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1963
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SERI BANDS

EDWARD MOSER

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ABSTRACT

105 In previous publications on the Seri, frequent reference to distinct
621 Seri groups points to historical tribal divisions at some level.
642 Recent research among the Seri has determined the former exist-
614 ence of six bands which included three dialect groups. Three of
the bands were subdivided into clans. These six bands, whose
[178] formation may have been caused largely by internal struggles,
were eventually crushed and reduced to a single group by the
devastation brought about by external conflict.

INTRODUCTION

101 The Seri tribe is located in Mexico along the coast of Sonora
131 between Bahia Kino and Puerto Libertad, and on Tiburon Island
[161] (Fig. 1). Today it consists of approximately two hundred and
178 eighty persons who call themselves *kongkaak*[1] "the people." Al-
621 though at one time it was comprised of six distinct bands (Fig. 2),
642 the tribe has now lost its band organization. However, much of
the late history of these now-defunct tribal units remains vivid
121 in the minds of the Seri. The purpose of this paper is to present
621 some of the salient features of these former bands, to discuss
642 certain interrelations between them, and to recount the Seri ver-
sion of the disintegration of the band system.[2]

114 Three published studies on the Seri should be mentioned.[3]
Of these, the reports by Kroeber and by Griffen are the more
reliable. All three investigators mention tribal divisions which
Griffen rightly designates as bands.

BANDS

642 BAND I *xika ʔai kkoii* "they who live toward the true wind"
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131 This group is commonly referred to in the literature as the
Tepoca or Salinero. As shown on Fig. 1, they inhabited an area
which extended from a point slightly north of Puerto Lobos to
Punta Tepopa on the south. The territory extended inland, encom-
passing the general area delimited by the San Ignacio River.

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FIG. 1. Area of Present Seri Occupation

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One descendant of this band states that long ago his ancestors wandered north from the region of Guaymas. Eventually, they established land rights to the coastal area extending from Campo Ona on the south to Puerto Lobos on the north. Before long, however, they relinquished claim to the area between Campo Ona and Punta Tepopa. [173] [167] [425]

It is to be understood, of course, that groups from this band, as well as groups from other bands, at times ranged far afield from their respective territories. Band I, for instance, had campsites as far north as the mouth of the Colorado River. [484]

642 BAND II *xika xnai kkoii* "they who live toward the south wind"
101 This group is commonly referred to as the Tastioteño. These
131 people roamed the coastal area from Guaymas to Bahía Kino.

BAND III *ta?eowkw kongkaak* "the people of Tiburon Island"

This band is referred to in the literature as the Seri or Tiburones. At one time their territory included only the northern and eastern coasts of Tiburon Island. Later it was extended to include the whole coastal strip of the mainland directly opposite the island.

BAND IV *?eno kongkaak* "the people of the desert"

The area this band occupied in the center of Tiburon Island is shown in Fig. 2.

642 BAND V *xnaamotat* "they who came from the direction of the
131 south wind"
173 The Seri believe that this band came originally from a region
628 south of Guaymas. It may have been the Upanguayma group
[101] mentioned in the literature. Its members came in contact with the members of Band II with whom they resided, apparently for a period of years. Whether the *xnaamotat* were Seri or non-Seri,
[197] I have been unable to ascertain. Since no informant suggests that this group spoke another language besides Seri, it seems reasonable to believe that it was simply a distinct dialect group.

642 The *xnaamotat* were a belligerent people and, after fighting
628 broke out between them and the members of Band II, they
721 traveled northward. Eventually they established themselves on
[131] the relatively small coastal strip located east of Punta Tepopa as shown in Fig. 2.

642 BAND VI *xika ?ast ano koii* "they who live in the mountains"

[101] This group, which has been recognized previously only by
[131] Griffen, inhabited San Esteban Island. It laid claim also to the greater part of the coast on the southern end of Tiburon Island. One informant stated that in earlier times this band had ranged over all of Tiburon Island except for the northern two-thirds of the eastern coast, but that they were slowly pushed southward by the movements of other groups.

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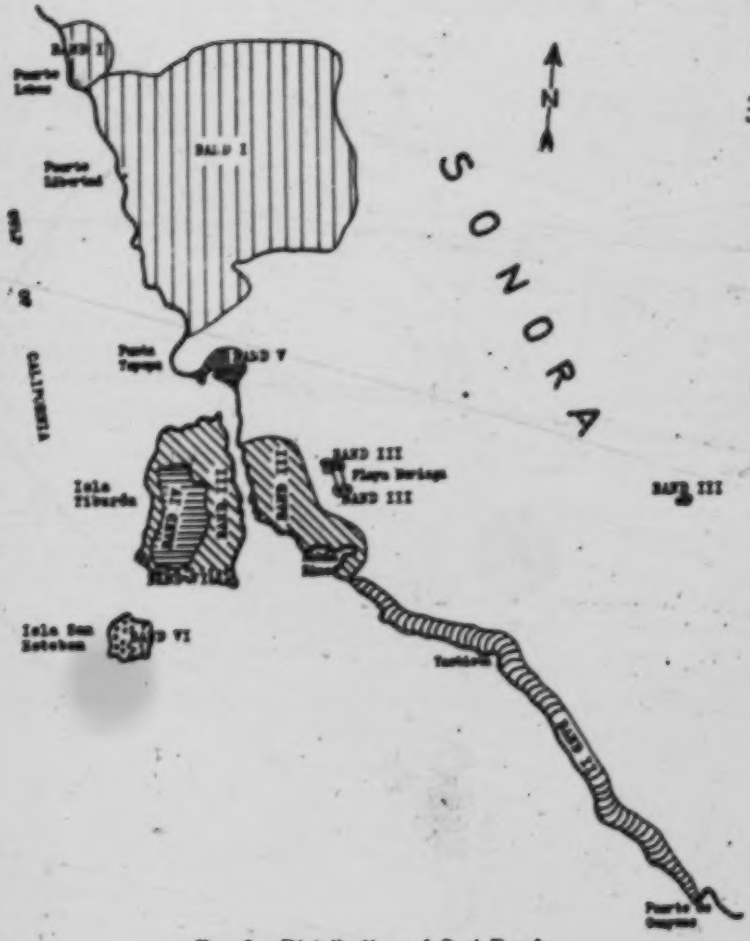

FIG. 2. Distribution of Seri Bands

DIALECTS

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The existence in former times of three distinct but mutually intelligible dialects seems evident.

Dialect 1 was spoken by Bands I, II, III, and IV. Any diversity of speech among these four bands seems to have been confined to word formation. The Seri language of today is derived largely from this dialect. [192]

Dialect 2 was spoken by Band V. This dialect is extinct and only scanty data on it can be gathered. From a number of expressions gathered, it appears that the dialect was characterized by extreme intonational contours. [194]

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[194]
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Dialect 3 was spoken by Band VI. This dialect, which is also extinct, is described by the informants as musical and is referred to as "singing talk." Expressions which are recalled are characterized by sharp pitch contours and heavy stress. Several grammatical constructions from this dialect have been found to contain morphemes unknown to present-day speakers.

The elicitable utterances and expressions of dialects 2 and 3 appear to employ the same segmental phonemes as present-day Seri.

BAND SUBDIVISIONS

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Three of the six bands were subdivided. The territorial subdivisions of those three, Bands I, III, and VI are shown on Figs. 3-5.

Band I

Band I became divided into six groups, each group occupying a subdivision of the band territory. Each such subdivision was called an *i?iziitng*. The name of the most prominent camp in each *i?iziitng* was generally used also as the name of that subdivision. The names of these subdivisions are;[4]

zaah ?akaila	"(arrows) shot at the cliff"
paiik ?aokwt	"driftwood huts"
xpano ?ax	"fresh water in the sea"
?aasixp	"white mesquite"
?axwii?om	"place of clams"
xapoya?	"sea lion . . ."

Band III

This band became subdivided into fifteen groups, named as follows;

?ah?ax	"whichever water"
kiazin	"long and narrow"
sakpatix	"_____"
?aank	"clam (species of)"
?atkisa	"rotten testicle"
taih it	"willow trunk"
inoo?kw kiiax	"rattling stone bay"
xniizk	"facing the wind"
takata	"_____"
?eeme	"camp"
?ast ?ax	"stone point (of arrow)"
soenitaa	"in front of Alcatraz Island"
xoxaokl	"the large ones"
kaii iti ktawkwo	"men of the dry lake bed"
?ax ipak	"the other side of the water"

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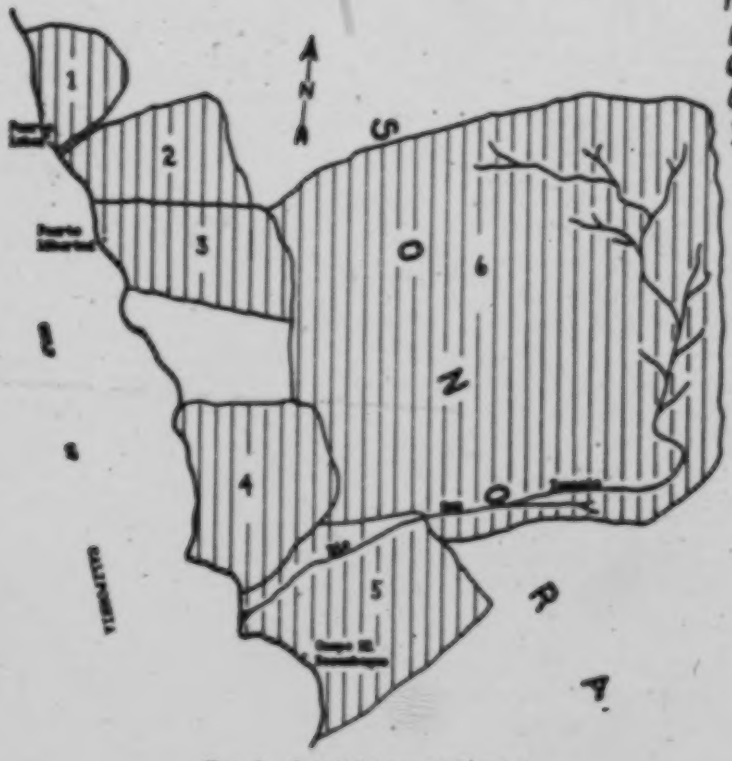

FIG. 3. Subdivisions of Band I

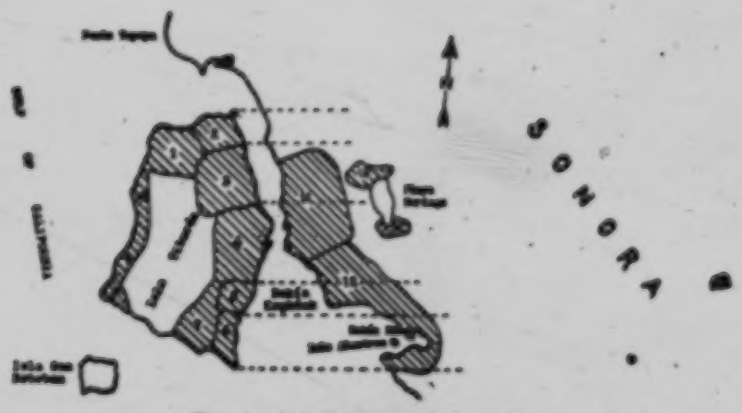

FIG. 4. Subdivisions of Band III

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621 Little information could be elicited about subdivisions 7, 8, 9, and 10. The reason for this might be that Band VI was slow in [169] abandoning those coastal areas (if it actually did inhabit them) [688] as it was being displaced by Bands III and IV.

621 The Seri say that long ago several men, called *?ant i?akimhoh* 642 "they who explain the land," came to Tiburon Island and told the 173 people along the eastern shore that they owned also a corre- 425 sponding strip of land on the mainland. Thus the inhabitants of 167 subdivisions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 laid claim to the coastal areas directly across the channel from them as shown by the dotted lines on Fig. 4. They assumed that their new territories extended inland [822] to include as much terrain as they chose to claim. At first the people went to their mainland areas primarily to gather cactus fruit. Eventually some of them remained on the mainland and established subdivisions 11 and 12. This establishment superseded the claims of the five Tiburon Island subdivisions to their main- [101] land territories. Although the mainland subdivisions 11 and 12 formed, in some respects, a separate band in their own right, they retained their name, *ta?eowkw kongkaak* "the people of Tiburon Island." Eventually this group returned to Tiburon.

621 Of subdivisions 13 and 14 which are shown on Fig. 4, very 642 little is known. The people of subdivision 13 inhabited an area 131, encompassing the northern end of the dry lake, La Playa Noriega [829] (San Bartolo). Some of the Seri believe that these people were giants. Although in this area I have found clay figurines and other [192] artifacts common to abandoned camps elsewhere, the Seri do not [193] know the names of the camps of this subdivision. Subdivision 14 occupied the area surrounding the southern end of the same dry lake.

Subdivision 15 occupied the general area which is now Villa de Seris, a settlement on the southern edge of Hermosillo. As [167] Hermosillo grew, it became increasingly difficult for these Seri to maintain their customary way of life, and they eventually returned to Tiburon Island.

642 BAND VI
621 Band VI became divided into four subdivisions, the names of 101 which are:

xnitom	"_____"
pahti	"flint"
kofte oki ifa	"large iguana peninsula"
kotih	"tubular"

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FIG. 5. Subdivisions of Band VI

BAND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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The social structure of the bands can be properly understood only in relation to the social structure of their smaller units, the *i?iziitang*. The kin group which resided in and dominated each such subdivision constituted a clan.[5] This group conforms to Murdock's three major specifications for clan designation.[6]

Murdock's first specification states that a kin group, to constitute a clan, must be based explicitly on a unilinear rule of descent. The kin group of each Seri band subdivision was based on patrilineal descent. An individual was closely associated with the group of kinsmen of his subdivision, all of whom were related to him through males only. The father was the head of his household. For example, he assumed leadership in marriage negotiations. Upon his death, the eldest son took his place.

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The second specification states that such a kin group must have residential unity. Seri marriages were exogamous with respect to the subdivision,[7] and the rule of residence was patrilocal. The domicile was set up near the home of the groom's parents.

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642 621 618 714 [186] [476]

The third specification states that a kin group, to constitute a clan, must exhibit actual social integration. Murdock stresses the necessity of observing a positive group sentiment, such as would be manifested by organized collective activities or group functions, before the group can be characterized as a clan. An essential feature of this group sentiment is the inclusion of the wife as an integral member of her husband's kin group.

621 618 [628] [622] [701] [583] [476]

This sort of social integration was indeed exhibited by the Seri kin group of each subdivision. It was, in fact, fostered by the isolation brought about by the inhabitants' reservation of hunting and fishing rights for themselves. Tension existed between certain subdivisions and, since there was no chief, the oldest capable male organized and led the fighting force of the clan. In times of need, the members of the group united to give mutual assistance. The groom-to-be could expect material aid from his fellow clan members in the payment of the bride price. Mutual assistance was given in the fulfillment of puberty ceremony and burial obligations. The men cooperated in their hunting and fishing expeditions. The women of the clan, including the in-married spouses, cooperated in the gathering and sharing of food. Everyone could attend the various fiestas. It is said that in the performance of these collective activities, close harmony generally prevailed.

BAND INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

642 619 578 [648]

The division of the Seri tribe into bands was likely brought about through internal strife. During the period of band history known to the present-day Seri,[8] however, serious skirmishes seem to have been fought predominantly with non-Seri groups.[9]

Band I

642 621 628 578 [721] [648]

Band I internal relations appear to have been relatively peaceful. The inhabitants of subdivisions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were fishermen as well as hunters and gatherers, whereas the people of subdivision 6 preferred to subsist on gathered food and wild game. Also, the members of Band I robbed cattle and horses, which pursuit brought reprisals from the Mexican ranchers. There was apparently considerable social intercourse among the six subdivisions, even to the extent that hunting rights of one were sometimes granted to inhabitants of a neighboring section.

Trouble developed when some members of Band I speared fish within the domain of Band V. Here also bitter fighting broke out, and any semblance of peaceful co-existence between the two groups was destroyed.

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Except for the occurrence of several battles, relations between Bands I and III were peaceful.

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Relations with non-Seri groups were not always peaceful. For many years the members of Band I were on friendly terms with the Papago; they often camped together and even intermarried. Due to a misunderstanding,[10] fighting erupted between the two groups and many people were killed in the years which followed.

Band II

[262]
[721]

The external relations of Band II were decidedly turbulent. Although their primary base of operations was a coastal area, the people did not use the ocean as a source of food. They preferred beef and horse meat which was easily acquired by stealing animals from ranches. Here again the wrath of the ranchers and the government was incurred.

[582]

A small group of Yaqui eventually joined Band II and intermarried with them. The Seri claim that the Yaqui induced the warriors of this band to assault travelers on the road between Hermosillo and Guaymas. Coyote Iguana, who according to Seri tradition captured Lola Casanova, was of this band. This activity soon brought retribution from the government. Later, dissension arose between these Seri and the Yaqui.

The enmity and strife that occurred between Bands II and V were mentioned above.

Band III

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The history of the internal relations of this band on Tiburon Island seems to have been marked by periods of violence. Battles between subdivisions sometimes occurred; however, they were usually short-lived and soon forgotten. A major struggle once occurred when a shaman named *?apetla* "the invincible one" and warriors from subdivision 4 made repeated raids upon the neighboring subdivisions and killed many. Eventually, his enemies overcame their fear and destroyed the killer.

[721]

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Although the inhabitants of Band III were hunters, gatherers, and fishermen, they began to rob cattle once they became established on the mainland. They too incurred the wrath of ranchers and the government.

Band IV

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Since the members of this band were, by choice, inhabiting an inland area of Tiburon Island, they lived in relative isolation as hunters and gatherers. Their primary contacts were with members of Band III with whom they intermarried.

[361]
[582]

BAND V

642 These people were apparently hunters, gatherers, and fishermen. It is said that they speared fish from the shore since they did not use *balsas*. They too apparently raided the ranches. Their warring nature has already been discussed; it resulted in the acquisition of few friends. However, several marriages between members of this band and members of subdivision 2 of Band III are said to have occurred.

BAND VI

The members of Band VI lived on San Esteban Island and were the most primitive of the tribe. They lived in huts made of driftwood and in caves and made extensive use of the balsa. Although they did not have the bow and arrow, they did become expert in the use of the spear. The people depended mainly on a seafood, iguana, and maguey diet.

621 Perhaps it was due to the confined living space on the small island with the accompanying lack of fresh water that relations between the four subdivisions were precarious and fights broke out frequently. The Seri today stress the fact that the members of this band were impetuous and unpredictable.

642 Their relations with the other bands were generally good however. Seri from Band III were free to visit San Esteban where they were well treated.

The San Esteban people seldom traveled to the mainland, and, since they spoke no Spanish, it is probable that they made no peaceful contact with non-Seri groups.

642 COLLAPSE OF THE BAND SYSTEM

628 Internal strife in the Seri tribe was probably a major factor 578 in the establishment of the band system. External strife was a 648 major factor in its downfall.

Reference has been made to the plundering, killings and rustling of cattle to which certain of the bands were dedicated. The concern of the Sonora government was aroused, and steps were taken to crush the rebellious groups. According to the present-day Seri, military action by army units and rancher outfits against the various bands resulted in the near-destruction of the whole tribe.[11]

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BAND V

It was stated above that this band fought with Band II and 628
then with Band I. Since Band V was likely killing cattle, they 648
also may have been harassed by soldiers. Eventually Band V [425]
abandoned its territory near Punta Tepopa and headed south [131]
along the coast to a camp near present-day Bahia Kino. From
this camp the entire group disappeared and was never seen again
by members of the other bands. The Seri of today believe that [173]
Band V either traveled inland or was destroyed by a non-Seri
force.

BAND II

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These people were rustlers and marauders. Government inter- 648
vention in the situation was inevitable. The Seri recount the 726
following final encounter between this group and the government
forces.

The entire remaining membership of Band II was hiding out in a nearly inaccessible swamp thicket at Bahia Kino. Knowing that an armed force of soldiers and ranchers was searching for them, the people left their camp to seek safety elsewhere. Almost immediately they were attacked by the superior armed force which proceeded to wipe out the whole group. A youth who had avoided capture is said to have reported the affair to the Seri on Tiburon Island. This event may have occurred during the Encinas [105]
Wars fought from 1855 to 1865.

BAND VI

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The members of this band on San Esteban Island were little 648
interested in the mainland and did not participate in the raids on 727
man and livestock there. Nevertheless, they were to share in the [721]
severe punishment meted out to the bands guilty of multitudi-
nous depredations.

Sometime after the massacre of Band II, a ship arrived at San Esteban, and many of the people were induced to go aboard. The rest of the inhabitants followed the ship to a camp on the eastern side of Tiburon Island where they were to receive gifts. As the people congregated, they were herded into a stone corral. Apparently, some of the San Esteban men were killed at this time. The rest of them, along with the women and children, were taken to Santa Rosa point on the mainland. Here, the Seri say, more of the men were killed. The remaining men were strung together by wire and led away, never to return.

The San Esteban women and children, along with some Tiburon Island women and children (of Band III), were taken in

642 648 727 the vessel to Guaymas. With the aid of a group of Yaqui, some of these women were said to have been permitted to go to Hermosillo and eventually to return to their home on Tiburon. Others of their group are said to have remained near Guaymas. The women who returned to Tiburon reported that the San Esteban women and children were put aboard another ship which sailed southward.

BANDS I, III, AND IV

642 648 72 As opposition from the Papago and government forces increased, the members of Band I were forced to seek refuge on Tiburon Island. The mainland members of Band III (subdivisions 11 and 12) were also forced, especially during the Encinas Wars, to flee to Tiburon. There the combined forces of Bands I, III, and IV sought to cope with the military expeditions sent out through the years to exterminate them. Tiburon Island is an adverse battlefield for the uninitiated; some expeditions were turned back due to lack of potable water or because of failure to make contact with the enemy in the mountainous terrain. Some expeditions did encounter the Seri, however, and many natives were either killed or captured.

642 648 178 [161] [618] Through the years, then, these military encounters, along with smallpox and measles epidemics, were responsible for reducing the Seri tribe to a small remnant. The band and clan systems lost their functional relevance as the people continued to live together for mutual protection. Shortly after the turn of the century, the expeditions and raids had practically ceased.

642 178 611 591 SIGNIFICANCE OF BANDS TODAY

With the dissolution of the band system, the rule of descent shifted from patrilineal to bilateral, and the rule of residence shifted from patrilocal to neolocal.

621 642 178 423 [428] [583] Although the substance of the band system is no longer a reality, the concept of land ownership still remains. A young Seri of today may choose to be associated with either the *i?iziiting* of his father or that of his mother. He is said to inherit part ownership of the area. It is recalled by one informant that in former times ownership of a mountain was especially important. Sometimes ownership of a mountain was included as part payment for a bride. Thus a person might 'own' a mountain in a subdivision other than his own.

231 552 178 A custom exists even today whereby a person names his dog after a mountain or other geographical point located in his subdivision. Although the person may re-use the name, each dog so named must be of the same sex as the first.

so named must be of the same sex as the first. The significance of land ownership needs further investigation.

Many of the Seri still prefer, when possible, to live in their chosen band area. Sometimes a person, when he is approaching death, will ask to be taken to his own i?iziiting, where he can die and be buried in the area of his choice.

NOTES

1. Due to printing limitations, stress on Seri words has been omitted, and several orthographic symbol changes have been made for this paper. The phonetic values of the symbols used are the following: p is voiceless labial stop; t is vl. dental stop; k is vl. velar stop; ? is glottal stop; f is vl. labial flat spirant; ɯ is vl. labial grooved-rounded spirant; s is vl. alveolar spirant; x is vl. alveo-palatal spirant; l is vl. lateral spirant; h is vl. velar spirant; x is vl. back velar spirant; m is labial nasal; n is dental nasal; ŋ is velar nasal; y is palatal semivowel; i is a high close front vowel; e is a low close front vowel; a is a low open central vowel; o is a mid close back vowel.

2. These data were compiled during field trips to the Seri camps during the years 1956-61, the studies being carried out under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The principal informant was R. Herrera T. whose information was checked with and supplemented by nine of the older members of the tribe. I am indebted to my colleague, David Thomas, who read an earlier draft of this paper and made helpful suggestions.

3. 1) W. J. McGee, "The Seri Indians," *Bureau of American Ethnology, Annual Report*, No. 17, Part 1. Washington, 1898. 2) A. L. Kroeber, "The Seri," *Southwest Museum Papers*, No. 6. Los Angeles, 1931. 3) W. B. Griffen, "Notes on Seri Indian Culture, Sonora, Mexico," *Latin American Monograph Series*, No. 10. Gainesville, 1959.

4. It will be noted that between subdivision 3 and 4 on Fig. 3 there is an unnumbered area, the status of which is uncertain.

5. Kroeber states that McGee's concept of Seri maternal lineages crystallized into totemic clans with matron rule seem a fantasy. In Kroeber's opinion, "The Seri may never have had sibs or clans; but the fact that they appear to lack them now is no positive evidence that they were without them three centuries ago. Shifts of residence, contraction of territory, shrinkage of numbers, amalgamation of distinct bands, may well have obliterated much of such social fabric as they once possessed."

Griffen discusses the nature of the former Seri bands and states, "they may have been patrilineal and exogamous. The criteria . . . that Julian Steward has exposited for the formation of exogamous, patrilineal bands . . . are and presumably would have been met formerly in the Seri habitat." Griffen lists other aspects of this type of band which are also verified to some extent by his data. From reading his material, it is obvious that he suspects the existence of clans at some earlier period. He emphasizes the need for further investigation.

6. G. P. Murdock, *Social Structure*, Macmillan Co., New York, 1949.

7. Marriages were usually contracted within the band.

8. As Kroeber points out, their memory likely covers only the latter part of the period of Spanish contacts.

9. The Seri recall nothing of Seri-Pima contacts and little of Seri-Apache relations.

10. The story is related that one day some Seri entered a cave where they found several Papago jugs filled with seeds. Being hungry, the people ate the seeds and left some arrows as token payment. The Seri say that the Papago apparently believed the arrows were intended as an insult. Fighting broke out soon afterward.

11. The Seri concept of the band annihilations is seen to be in contradiction to McGee's statement (p. 132): "Concordantly with their primary characteristic, the Seri have avoided ethnic and demotic union beyond the narrow limits of their own kindred; and even of these they seem to have cast out parts, annihilating the Guayma and Upanguayma, displacing and nearly destroying the Tepoka, and outlawing individuals and (apparently) small groups."

11: Moser, Edward.

rather than 614; this in contrast to other sources in this file where given less specific information similar data have been placed in the 614 category.

Footnotes appearing in the text will be found at the end of the source in category 116, p. 27.]

Field date: 1956-1961
Analyst: Gilbert Winer

Evaluation: Linguist-5
Processed in 1967

11: Moser

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/For information on the organization of the Seri into bands, see category 642./